

An Essay
On
The Hemorrhagic Diathesis.

Respectfully submitted
To the Faculty
Of the
Homoeopathic Medical College
Of Pennsylvania.

For the Degree of Doctor of Medicine.

By
John C. Clark Downing.
Of
New York.

Philadelphia. Feb ²⁴/_{th} 1859

The hemorrhagic diathesis, is a disease, or condition of the system which manifests itself, in the manner following. The patient suffering from the affection, who is usually a child, has a pale, cachectic appearance, and is subject to a loss of blood upon the reception of an injury, which loss, is very disproportionate to the amount and character of the injury received. For example, a scratch, inflicted by so trifling a thing as a pin, will be followed by hemorrhage, which for a long time will resist the common

appliances to such cases. Also a blow, or fall, upon the nose will occasion epistaxis to an alarming extent. The blood which issues from the injured surface, is of a dark, unhealthy appearance, does not readily coagulate, and the clot which does form, is quite loose and friable. The cause of this slow and imperfect coagulation will be alluded to hereafter. The peculiar diathesis under consideration, is usually to be met with among the poorer classes such as are compelled to live in damp or badly ventilated apartments to subsist upon scanty and of-

-ten unwholesome food, and who are insufficiently clothed and protected from the weather

The hemorrhagic diathesis, was formerly supposed to be caused by, or to depend upon, a deficient supply, or proportions of fibrin in the blood, for, although the capillaries were known to be also in an abnormal state, still it was the fibrin that was in fault. As it was thought that fibrin was useful and in fact all important in the building up of tissue then it followed that any defect either in the quantity, or the quality, of the fibrin would

react upon and alter the tissues dependant upon it hence the capillaries were deficient in their usual qualities or properties. It certainly is the fact that in the hemorrhagic diathesis the quantity of the fibrin present in the blood is much less than the normal standard and it also is different in appearance and in its actions. These facts however, do not explain the cause of the excessive hemorrhages occurring during the continuance of the disease under consideration. Because, in the first place, now that the old theo-

ry concerning the uses of fibrin, and its office in the economy, has been pretty well ascertained to be without foundation, and that fibrin, instead of being useful in the formation of tissues, is merely the debris, or more properly, the result of the destructive transformations of the tissues, it follows, that the abnormal condition of the capillaries, instead of being caused by, deficient, or badly elaborated fibrin, is really the cause, of that very deficiency, and imperfection. The well known fact, that in Scum, we find a large increase in the quan-

tity of fibrin in the blood, shows that the hemorrhages, so long continued, and so difficult to arrest, which occur in the diathesis first mentioned, are not owing to the want of fibrin in the blood, because one of the worst symptoms of Scurvy is the hemorrhages which occur during its continuance.

The hemorrhagic diathesis, undoubtedly, is owing to the deranged state of the capillaries. When wounded they do not close, as capillaries usually do when exposed to the atmosphere, they remain open, their caliber dilated and per-

mitting the blood to issue unchecked. This state of things is owing to their innutrition from the various causes mentioned in the beginning.

The fibrin, being formed from the tissues, of course if the tissues are imperfectly formed, the fibrin can scarcely be expected to be normal.

Somewhat analagous to the disease under consideration is that affection termed, *Purpura Hemorrhagica*.

This consists of spots of blood, extravasated by the capillaries into the subcutaneous, and submucous tissues.

Purpura is rarely found as disease. *per se*. it is generally an accompaniment, and symptom, of some other disease. Typhus, for instance, is a familiar example. When thus accompanying a disease, it is a very unfavourable symptom, but its treatment, of course, is dependent upon the other symptoms, the totality of which, go to make up the disease. When Purpura does exist as an affection by itself, its origin can often be traced to the same causes as those which induce the hemorrhagic diathesis, only that, as Purpura

is found in adults, great fatigue, and over-work, may also, have their influence in inducing the disease. Hematuria, and Hemoptysis, will frequently occur in the progress of this disease, more especially in dangerous cases—

The treatment of the hemorrhagic diathesis, by physicians of the old school, being founded upon an erroneous theory, can hardly be supposed to have accomplished much, towards the cure of the disease. The medicines which they chiefly relied upon, were the preparations of Pot-

ash, and Soda, but as the effects of these medicines were, in this disease, very uncertain, each practitioner used that drug, which, might seem to him, to have most relation to the disease - It was well known that, with them as with us, the most efficacious means in its treatment, were, good, nourishing diet, fresh air, exercise, cleanliness, and in short, the comforts of life, by the aid of these, without medicine, nearly all cases could be cured, without them, few if any - The first time a physician sees a case

of the hemorrhagic diathesis, is usually when some slight injury has been inflicted upon the patient, the bleeding from which the attendants are not able to stop.

Even the physician himself may be taxed before he can arrest the hemorrhage. After this has been done the state of the patient may and usually will require a few doses of China and that in a low attenuation. The remedies which are generally required in the treatment of this disease are. Arsenicum, Calcarua carb. Crotales or Lachesis, Ferrum m. s. Kali carb. and Phosphorus. There may be other medicines

indicated during the progress of the disease, but the list mentioned seems to cover all the symptoms likely to be met with.

For the treatment of Purpura we have Carbo veg. Kali hydroc. Lachesis and Sulphuric acid -

Hamamelis virg. may be useful in some cases of the hemorrhagic diathesis, but its action is not so well understood as the other remedies and it requires farther trial. It may sometimes happen that a case of this diathesis will resist all the remedies at our command. Such a patient came under the notice of the writer a few years ago -

The subject was a young man about twenty six years of age a carpenter by trade originally - In appearance he was tolerably healthy, with a sanguine temperament, light hair and eyes -

This man lived in daily fear of his life from the almost uncontrollable hemorrhag which took place from the slight injuries, and abrasions of the skin, which are liable to happen at all times to a man pursuing his trade. For this reason he became a painter thinking that he would be safer than when among edged tools. The treatment of several distinguished physicians of the

old practice availed nothing in altering this condition and it is probable that the capillaries were almost totally deficient in that coat which induces their contraction on exposure to any stimulus, as the air -

If this were the fact of course no medicine would be of any use. Such cases at least such extreme ones are rare although there is great difference in respect to the quantity of blood which will flow from different individuals under the same circumstances and from similar wounds. In some persons, quite large vessels close, merely upon exposure

to the air, while in others we
must take considerable pains
to arrest the bleeding from
quite small wounds. But thus
it is, in everything - *Spissimiles
inter se sunt semper homines* -